



# STATE OF CHILDREN IN EAST TURKESTAN

## Ethnic and Cultural Genocide

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Ethnic and Cultural Genocide**

The Chinese government has escalated the policies of oppression, assimilation and deterrence in East Turkestan in north-west China which is named in Chinese resources as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) after Communist Party Secretary Chen Quanguo assumed leadership of the region in 2016.

Since 2014 hacker groups connected to the state were in full swing, targeting Uyghur mobile users around the world for mass real-time surveillance (Mozur and Perloth, 2020, cited in Millward and Peterson, 2020). A new counterterrorism law in 2015, a “de-extremification” ordinance in 2017, and a revision of the regulations governing religions affairs in 2017 provided new, often vaguely worded, justifications for detaining and punishing Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other Muslims based on symbols and practices related to Islamic belief and other behavior (Millward ve Peterson, 2020).

In his first year in Xinjiang, Chen Quanguo hired 100,000 new security personnel and built thousands of “Convenience Police Stations” to implement grid policing. Chen supplemented conventional police methods with facial recognition video, cell phone inspection software, remote cell phone tracking and sniffing (remote data collection), and the gathering of personal information (banking, travel, social media, religious practice) as well as biometric data (Leibold, 2020).



Source: Buckley, Chris ve Qin, Amy (2019).  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/12/world/asia/china-xinjiang.html>.  
Accessed: 13.02.2020

In principle, all data is entered into the Integrated Joint Military Operations Platform (IJOP, 一体化联合 作战平台). The IJOP uses algorithms to predict the likelihood of “extremism” in individuals and sort them for imprisonment, indoctrination, or surveillance, and legitimizes computational racism by punishing the entire Uyghur ethnic group for behaviors and beliefs deemed suspicious by authorities. Such behavior includes insufficient socialization with neighbors, avoiding the front door, having more than two children, or having foreign contacts (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2019).

In 2017 and 2018, more than 350,000 people were prosecuted through the legal system, while in previous years, the figure had been less than 30,000 annually. In addition, Chen expanded so-called “concentrated educational transformation” (集中教育转化) which had been opened to fight against some social problems (Millward ve Peterson, 2020).

According to an article by Wang (2018) from Human Rights Watch these outrageous practices of the Chinese Government violate fundamental rights to *freedom of expression, religion,*

and *privacy*, and protections from torture and unfair trials. By and large, violation of basic human rights in East Turkestan primarily affects ethnic Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other minorities, and this also means violation of international law's prohibitions against discrimination. International media attention on East Turkestan has thus far focused on the *political education camps*. Despite the fact that the Chinese government provides no public information, data or statistics on the number of detainees in these camps, credible resources guess the number in these camps at around three million. Within these secretive facilities, those held are forced to undergo political indoctrination for days, months, and even over a year (Wang, 2018).

A report prepared by USA based Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy and Raoul and Wallenberg Center for Human Rights (2021) took the violations by China as the Uyghur Genocide with reference to the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention). According to this, the following constitute the reasons for the genocide:

- Intent to destroy,
- High-level statements of intent and general plan,
- Comprehensive State policy, pattern of conduct and repeated destructive acts,
- The Government of China has deployed Han cadres to reside in Uyghur homes as monitors, resulting in the rupturing of family bonds
- County governments further coerce, incentivize, and actively promote Han-Uyghur marriages; the legislature formally legalized the mass internment of Uyghurs under “De-Extremification” regulations
- Mass Birth-Prevention Strategy was implemented and this included forced abortions

- China began building a vast network of massive State-run, highly securitized boarding schools and orphanages to confine Uyghur children, including infants, full time
- The Uyghur identity, community, and domestic life was eradicated
- Intellectuals and community leaders were selectively targeted.
- Uyghurs suffer serious bodily and mental harm from systematic torture and cruel treatment, including rape, sexual abuse, exploitation, and public humiliation, at the hands of camp officials and Han cadres assigned to Uyghur homes under Government-mandated programs,
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- Where detentions and forced labor schemes are leaving Uyghur children bereft of both parents, they are being sent to State run orphanages and raised in Chinese language environments with standard Han child rearing methods.

While it is extremely difficult to reach any information or data on the adult detainees in the camps reaching any information or data on children is almost impossible.

Due to the impossibility of reaching quantitative data and statistics this report makes use of qualitative studies and some interviews by journalists. Reaching the public data on torture, abuse and violence is always difficult; thus, qualitative data is of extreme significance. Because one needs more than statistics in order to understand the very nature of these practices.

It is apparent that detention of the adults has disruptive effects on families. Children whose parents have been sent to the camps are often forced to stay in state-run orphanages.

Uighur parents living outside of China often face a difficult choice: return home to be with their children and risk detention, or stay abroad, separated from their children and unable to contact them (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

While parents are detained in political education camps it is understood that children are also forced to political indoctrination in various central schools. According to a news report in The New York Times comparing the statements of the Chinese officials and real life experiences about the state of children in East Turkestan (2020), Chinese officials claim that children in East Turkestan are trained in central schools, but indeed this is one of the euphemistic terms the Chinese government uses to refer to the sprawling network of indoctrination camps. Chinese officials accept the fact that parents are sent to the camps, and legitimize and ideologize this using the concept of “Three Forces”. According to this, the detainees are under the influence of the “Three Forces” which is comprised of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism. The government’s definition of extremism often includes behavior that would be considered ordinary elsewhere, such as growing a beard or praying five times a day.

The policies of oppression and assimilation do not only consist of the camps; giving Muslim names to children and such religious and traditional practices as circumcision are forbidden in the region (Federation of American Scientists, 2019).

## **Assimilation Policies toward Children**

According to a report by an Italy based journal “Bitter Winter” which publishes mainly on human rights violations in China having secretly recorded one of the nurseries which mean “loving heart” little children are placed whose parents are detained in the camps (cited in Euronews, 2020);



Source: Euronews (2020). <https://tr.euronews.com/2019/01/31/dogu-turkistanli-cocuklarin-tutuldugu-toplama-kampi-gizli-kamerada>. Accessed: 24.01.2020

Under intense security measures children are placed on a full-time basis in centers where the language of education is only Chinese, and they have no connection with the outside world. Children are not allowed to go out, either.

Having been enclosed with high walls and wire entanglement so-called “schools” are intensely protected.

Children are allowed to meet their parents under the accompany of the officials only once a month.

A kindergarten teacher who keeps her/his name secret states that children in camps burst into tears after meeting their parents.

Children whose both parents are detained in camps are defined as “double-detained family” in Chinese registration records.

In secret shooting of the camps following are observed: there are such equipment as casque and shield that are used in intervening in social protests in a room in the entrance of the camp; people with military camouflage give training to children; there are maps of China on the walls of the dormitories, and there are such propaganda statements as “I am Chinese and I love my country” on the walls.

Beijing Government appoints also soldiers to give children military training.

In an interview with Bitter Winter a teacher states that children especially in the evening cry saying “I want my parents, I want to go home”, and this puts pressure on the staff of the school the most. The news emphasizes that teachers are appointed without their will.

A teacher who previously worked in a camp in the city of Bole where 200 Uyghur children were placed states that mental state of children are destroyed day to day. The teacher says some children drink chlorine water to give harm to themselves and some swallow fishbone. And children often ask “Are we in prison now?”

A prison guard in East Turkestan states that the Chinese Government implements a very harsh and rigid training for the minority children and thus keeps them isolated.

Young Uyghurs under the accompany of the public security policemen are forced to follow the monotype Chinese curriculum prepared by the government.

Children are forced to speak only in Chinese, eat pork meat, wear clothes the government sees proper, and live according to the habits and traditions determined by the government.

There are 11 nurseries where 1-3 years old children are placed in only one city of East Turkestan. There are also 9 nurseries for 3-6 years old children and 7 kindergarten-camps. In only a small district of East Turkestan over 2000 children are trained in these so-called schools.

## **Family Separation**

“The real-life report of a Chinese volunteer teacher paints a harrowing picture of the consequences of systematic intergenerational separation. The young man taught in an impover-

ished rural primary school, where pupils were mostly without parents due to internment in vocational training camps. The young teacher states that these Uyghur children were in an extremely pitiful state, wearing thin clothes despite freezing December weather. The classroom was filled with an unbearable stench because the children neither washed nor changed their clothes” (Zenz, 2019). According to the evidence which Zenz (2019) collected from various resourced;

There may be various forms and levels of intergenerational separation such as full daycare during work days, entire work weeks, and longer-term full-time separation.

According to the accounts of Uyghur parents in exile, children as young as 2 years, with both parents in either internment or exile, are put into state welfare institutions or kept full-time in educational boarding facilities. Social service agencies may variously be described as orphanages or different types of “children’s’ shelters”, “child welfare guidance center” or “protection centers”.

According to another anecdotal evidence, children above a certain age are required to attend a boarding school where they only return home during weekends and holidays.

Government and media sources in euphemistic terms calls the camps “vocational training center”.

By the state’s confession, these camps are dedicated brain-washing institutions: “Vocational Skills Education Training Centers” wash clean the brains of people who became bewitched by the extreme religious ideologies of the ‘Three Forces’.

Some propaganda pieces point out that children are placed into full care facilities so that the parents can focus on their “studies” or their new “work”. For example, the Hotan City Vocational Skills Education Training Center has an immediately adjacent “sunshine” preschool and primary school so that parents can engage in “carefree study”.

The children “eat and live” at the schools, and many of them reportedly started to call their teachers “mummy”. This statement, meant to indicate the close and caring relationship between teachers and children, could also be a reflection of the fact that they see their real parents very rarely, if at all. According to the report, children are told that they and their parents are both “studying” so that their “family life will be happier in the future”. Another report about another preschool connected to the same “vocational training” camp, the Hotan City Kindness Preschool, says that it admits children who are only a few months old.

Such a report about the Yutian County Vocational Skills Education Training Center states that because the children eat and live for free at these schools, their parents can save up their work incomes for the children’s future education. Another article about the same facility notes that while the children are taken care of at the preschool, the female workers can freely enjoy life by dancing in the public square.

An article about an Egyptian media team’s visit to Hotan’s Vocational Training Center also describes a nursery right inside a factory where women can drop off their children during the work day. The workers are said to be “graduates” from the region’s “vocational education and training center” where they “studied” for a period of 1.5 years.

Human Rights Watch’s (2019) interviews with the parents living abroad and having lost contact with their children reveal that the Chinese Government placed children in state institutions without the will of their families and split of their ties. Some passages from these interviews are the following:

- *Every time when I see a child of my children’s age on the street, I start to cry.*
- *My eyes hurt terribly from too much crying I miss my children very much. I don’t know where they are. All my relatives are detained. No one could look for my*

*sons. I've written 50 letters to the Chinese government. I took them to the Chinese embassy in Bishkek. I want the Chinese government to release my children, my sisters' children, and allow them to come to Kyrgyzstan, to live in their motherland.*

- *I don't know where my 16 grandchildren are. Everyone is gone. I miss them a lot. I dream a lot. I dream all my grandchildren altogether coming to Kyrgyzstan, to be united with us.*

## **How do the Chinese Government Sources Explain the Situation?**

The Chinese Government first denied the existence of the camps, but due to the increasing pressure of the international public opinion started to talk about the camps as “vocational education and training programs” in 2018. In 2019 the official name of the camps became “vocational training centers”.

In a meeting room with foreign and Chinese journalists, the “chairman of the Xinjiang Government”, Shohrat Zakir denied the existence of the camps and claimed that the centers are like boarding schools where the students eat and live for free. According to Zakir, over all, the education training centers will have fewer and fewer people, and if one day society doesn't need them, these centers can gradually disappear (Buckley ve Qin, 2019).

A Chinese newspaper's interview with Zakir reveals that he thinks the centers have been successful in combatting against the “Three Forces” namely terrorism, separatism and religious extremism, and thus a healthy and peaceful social atmosphere began to rise in China (Xinhuanet, 2018). Nevertheless, the Chinese Government continues to avoid sharing the objective

reports on the issue and statistics with the public. Instead it misleads the international public opinion by “choreographed visits” to the region (Blanchard, 2019).

## **Attitude of the United Nations and the Affiliated Organizations**

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet told reporters at the end of 2018 that her office was receiving worrying reports about the human rights situation in the region, and her office was asking for direct access to the region to verify the reports. International human rights groups were reporting that many Uyghur Muslims in the region have been unfairly detained in the name of counterterrorism and forced to go through “reeducation” under terrible conditions (UNPO, 2018).

At a UN review of China’s human rights record Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng denied the accusations with the following words: “We will not accept the politically-driven accusations from a few countries that are fraught with biases” (Keaten and Wang, 2018).

China’s treatment of Uyghurs in the region drew major criticism from 23 members of the United Nations in 2019. The statement, delivered by U.K. Ambassador Karen Pierce, represented this critical position of 23 countries as the following: “We call on the Chinese government to uphold its national laws and international obligations and commitments to respect human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, in Xinjiang and across China” (Whong, 2019).

Despite the calls of the United Nations apparently stating their worry there is not any loud call, report or action of the affiliated organizations about the human rights violations in East

Turkestan. Children come at the top of the victims of human rights violations in East Turkestan and for instance UNICEF has not broken the silence yet.

According to an article by Ruoqiao (2013) from the UNICEF China about the children in the region, since 2011, UNICEF has supported a Ministry of Civil Affairs program in the region to protect vulnerable children, including children on the Street, and 350 children have found new direction in their life. Despite the fact that the article focuses on the vulnerable children in the region and praises the collaboration with the Chinese Government it ignores the human rights violations in the region.

Correspondingly, neither the report “Unicef in China and Beyond” (2016) nor the report “Population Status of Ethnic Minority Children in China in 2015” (2015) mentions the human rights violations in the region.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

As a result, the oppression and assimilation policies of the Chinese Government influence not only adults, but also children. As adults are detained in political indoctrination and training camps, children are forced to stay in state driven orphanages which are given ironic names such as love, compassion, etc. and where they lose contact with their families. Number of those who are placed in orphanages is unknown and it is understood that the Chinese Government has assumed “family separation” as a policy.

It is pretty obvious that these policies and implementations violate especially the following rights of children guaranteed by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: nondiscrimination, seeking the best interests of the child, ensuring the survival and development of the child, and participation.

According to the convention, children have universal rights irrespective of their language, religion, race and culture, and they cannot be violated. Children of East Turkestan are not an exemption to this and international public opinion must not be oblivious to the violations.

The family separation policy and implementation of forcibly placing children into the state driven orphanages and schools of the Chinese Government apparently and evidently violate the principles of the best interests of the child and participation. Children must be asked in decisions that may influence their life.

We call on the Chinese Government to respect for human beings and human dignity without any distinction between children and adults.

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